



PHOTO BY JIM ROBERTSON

Guthrie Police Department Sgt. John Lancaster

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Sgt. John Lancaster, 39, discovered his zeal for policing right out of high school. And after 17 years in the career, this successful sergeant, trained CIT officer and father of five is still as excited about his career choice as ever. Beginning his career with the Guthrie Police Department in 1996 and then returning to the department in 2005, Lancaster feels like working in Guthrie and serving alongside a chief whom he graduated the academy with, is right where he’s supposed to be. As a warm-hearted, compassionate officer, Lancaster helped lead his Academy of Police Supervision class to serve a family in need after a chance encounter with a distressed grandfather at a gas station. That same kindness has allowed him to change the lives of many citizens throughout his career.

Right out of high school I worked at a veterinary clinic in Hopkinsville, working with the Hopkinsville Police Department K-9 officers. I helped take care of their dogs when they were out of town. I learned how to control the dogs and care for them. That was a stepping stone for me for getting into law enforcement. Working with those guys and them mentoring me, going on ride alongs with them and training with them — it just grabbed hold. Like moss growing on a tree — it took me over.

My grandfather was a fire chief in Hopkinsville, my great uncle retired as the deputy chief and my dad as a captain. I think my dad thought I turned my back on the family business by not going on to become a fireman. I was a volunteer fireman — but it just didn’t turn my crank. Policing is just what I felt like I needed to do — it’s kind of been my calling. I guess most guys who have done this as long as I have, it’s in their blood and it’s hard to get away.

Then-officers Kerry Hayes and Roger Robinson got into a shootout with some guys right about the time I was riding along with a Hopkinsville K-9 unit. I guess that was the pivotal moment of when I wanted to become a police officer.

I took it very personal that someone would do that to a police officer because I’d been taught that police officers, firefighters, teachers — you give them the utmost respect. Not because of the person they are,

but simply because of their position. For someone to disrespect that, went against everything I’d ever been taught. It was that moment in life when I realized, not everyone’s a good person; there are a lot of bad people out there.

While I was attending APS Class No. 51, I stopped in Campbellsville to refuel my vehicle as I was coming back home. I had on a T-shirt that said ‘UK obsession’ — I’m a wildcat fan and have been since I was able to breathe. I was standing there fueling up and this guy said, ‘I like your shirt.’ I said, ‘Thank you, I’m kind of fond of the Wildcats.’ He said, ‘We are too. My grandson has been over at the hospital; they have a real nice hospital.’

I told him I was sorry to hear his grandson was there. I said, ‘It’s never a good thing when a child is there.’ He got into his van and told me to have a good day. I said, ‘You too and I’ll pray for your grandson.’ He started to pull away then stopped and threw the door open and came back.

He said, ‘You’re the only person who has said that.’ I asked him his grandson’s name and he said ‘Samson.’ He asked if I wanted to see a picture of him. I’m expecting to see a young boy at the hospital — I don’t have any idea what’s wrong with him. He shows me a picture of a baby that is about 2 pounds. He said he was born at 25 weeks. It grabbed my heart and squeezed it.

I was trying to muster up something in me to fight back what emotionally wanted to come out. The grandfather was tearing up. He said, ‘Thank you, I appreciate it,’ and started to drive off, then stopped again. He said thank you again and came over and bear hugged me. I didn’t know this guy, I didn’t know his name; all I knew was Baby Samson.

It ate at me all weekend. So, on Monday, I stepped up in front of the APS class and told everyone about it. We collected around \$250. We went to Wal-Mart and bought a bunch of easy food you can throw

in the microwave, cokes, waters, snack crackers, busy work puzzles and a teddy bear.

The entire week before we went up there, everyone in the class was calling every doctor or nurse they knew to get information. The most information we got was yes, Baby Samson was there. They eventually found the mom and grandma who were over at the Ronald McDonald House. They came over and met us, and they were just overwhelmed.

It was a really emotional thing for all of us. It really bonded our class together. This experience broke a lot of walls and barriers down, allowing people to talk and be more open.

I’ve never been a follower — I’ve always marched to the beat of my own drum as far as being leader. After going through APS, it got me on the path toward leadership.

My biggest challenge is working child sex-abuse cases. I worked 11 of them at one time about two years ago. Thank goodness we haven’t had any since then. It would make a sober man want to drink every night. It’s very difficult as a father, so I treat each kid as if they were my child in each case. I want to make sure there are no issues with the case. I want it air tight before we take it to the grand jury.

In 2005, I arrested two folks who were severely addicted to crack cocaine. They had been to rehab six, seven or eight times. It made me ill that I was being asked to probate their sentence for rehab again. I challenged them saying, ‘I want you to get better, but I don’t think you ever will. Prove me wrong.’ And they both saw me at our Heritage Days Festival this summer and thanked me and gave me a hug. They’ve been clean and sober ever since. That’s rewarding to know that final time, I finally made a difference for somebody.

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